

JOHNSON-LARSON BILL EXAMINES NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS FOR FARMINGTON RIVER

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congresswoman Nancy Johnson (R-5th) and Congressman John Larson (D-1st) today reintroduced legislation aimed at adding the Farmington River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program.

The bill commissions a feasibility study to evaluate whether the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook qualify as a Wild and Scenic Partnership River within the National Park Service's National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The lower Farmington River is defined as the 40 mile stretch between the lower Collinsville Dam in Burlington and the Rainbow Dam in Windsor in the First and Fifth congressional districts.

"The Farmington River and Salmon Brook's recreational and environmental contributions to our state are well-known, and we must protect them for future generations," Johnson said. "The western branch of the Farmington River has flourished as a Wild and Scenic river, and its designation has fostered important public-private partnerships. This new legislation builds on that success by taking necessary steps to add the lower sections of the river to the program."

"The Farmington River and Salmon Brook are unique cultural and recreational resources for my district and the State of Connecticut," said Larson. "Threats to the Lower Farmington's water quality demonstrate the urgent need for a cooperative effort among federal, state, and local interests to preserve the river for future generations. The Lower Farmington clearly deserves federal protection and would make a valuable addition to the Wild and Scenic River System."

A feasibility study of the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook is the first step toward winning a "wild and scenic" designation for the two waterways. The Johnson-Larson bill, the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic River Study Act of 2005, was first introduced by the two lawmakers last year.

The 14 miles of the Farmington River's West Branch, designated as a Wild and Scenic Partnership River in 1994, is a resounding environmental and economic success story. Partnership designation for the West Branch has fostered public-private partnerships to preserve the area's environment and heritage while yielding economic benefits to river towns.

Johnson and Larson said they hoped to see the rest of the Farmington River, as well as Salmon Brook, enjoy similar success.

The West Branch of the river is home to trout, river otter and bald eagle populations, and historic structures still grace its banks. Fishermen, hikers, canoeists and kayakers enjoy the river and its banks year-round.

In addition, a 2003 study by North Carolina State University found that partnership designation resulted in millions in economic activity and increased property values in the river towns of Barkhamsted, Canton, Colebrook, Hartland, and New Hartford.

U.S. Reps. Christopher Shays (R-4th), Rosa DeLauro (D-3rd) and Rob Simmons (R-2nd) are original co-sponsors of the Johnson-Larson bill, and the Farmington River Watershed Association, the Farmington Land Trust and the towns bordering the river join in supporting this bipartisan legislation.

"We are fortunate in Connecticut to have true river champions like Congresswoman Nancy Johnson and Congressman John Larson. Their environmental records are both outstanding and their shared commitment to long-term river protection is admirable," said Eric Hammerling, Executive Director of the Farmington River Watershed Association. "Fourteen miles of the river were designated in 1994. Eleven years later, it's showing benefits to towns and maintaining protections for the river. This new initiative is an ideal way to extend that protection and showcase the river. It's about recognizing cultural, natural, and recreational resources, and the Farmington River has them in abundance."

Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1968 to preserve the character of scenic, recreational, or historic rivers and their immediate environments, as well as to ensure development preserves the free-flowing condition of these rivers. As part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, the Wild and Scenic Partnership Rivers program "helps communities preserve and manage their own river-related resources locally by bringing together State, county, and community managers to preserve the outstanding and remarkable values for which the rivers were set aside," according to the National Park Service.

More information on the Wild and Scenic River System can be found at <www.nps.gov/rivers> and <www.nps.gov/pwsr>.

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